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Federal Railroad Administration
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Good afternoon.

It is such a pleasure to be here today with my colleague and friend Therese McMillan to address all of you.

You know in my old role, as the chief of staff for Secretary Foxx, I always appreciated the commitment that this organization shares with the Administration's goal of making our national transportation network safer, more interconnected, more reliable and more efficient.

To your president, Michael Melaniphy, your board, your members and staff, thank you for your partnership and support over the years. I am so honored to be here with you today, as there are no greater friends to the Department of Transportation.

Now I am a pretty frank person, so let me get right to my main points – today I want to spend our time talking first about safety, and the importance of bringing a fresh perspective and new thinking to some old problems, and then about rail and surface reauthorization, and the incredibly important opportunities we see there.

But first safety.

As all of you know, and much to the credit of the people sitting in this room, over the last decade, total train accidents are down. Derailments are down. Highway grade crossing incidents have declined. The rail industry, in many ways, is safer than it has ever been in history. That is all good news, and all of you deserve great credit for those improvements.

But most recently, some of those numbers look to be ticking up on us again. Over the last year, the number of incidents at grade crossings increased by 9 percent, and the number of fatalities at grade crossings increased by 16 percent. And while this next figure is less of an issue for the commuter rails to be worried about, just this morning the Wall Street Journal reported on FRA data showing the number of fiery and violent rupture accidents is also on the rise.

So my point is this –

Those most recent statistics alone serve as a stark reminder that our work is not done. We still have a long way to go to get to zero accidents, injuries, and fatalities.

You know, just two weeks into my new job at the FRA, a grade crossing accident occurred in New York, killing 6 people and injuring 15. . Three weeks later, another passenger rail grade crossing accident occurred in California, and a Metrolink crew member died and 27 other passengers were injured. Stark and painful reminders that we have a ways to go to make grade crossings safer.

And that is just one reason why safety is the centerpiece of the Administration's rail reauthorization proposal.

But in addition to our own legislative proposals, we have to take independent actions as well.

Just because a problem is an old problem, maybe one that we think can never be fully solved, doesn't mean we shouldn't give it a fresh look, and asking ourselves, "what more can we be doing?"

Following the Metro North grade crossing incident, I immediately asked our FRA staff – men and women who have literally dedicated entire careers to keeping people safe at or near crossings - to take a fresh look at how we approach safety at crossings.

Last week, I called upon law enforcement agencies to step up more patrols at grade crossings, to increase their efforts to write citations to drivers who don't obey the rules of the road, and to immediately begin employing best practices to better safeguard communities.

In the coming weeks we will have more to announce - about increasing public awareness about grade crossing dangers, about how to better employ technology, and about how we might be

able to increase funding to assist local communities that want to improve safety features at grade crossings.

Other than the friends and families of grade crossing victims, of course no one understands the pain of these incidents quite like the train crews and operators. These incidents are truly devastating for everyone ,and we shouldn't lose sight of the price that so many of your colleagues have paid.

As we have on so many other safety items over the years, we look forward to working with all of you, partnering with all of you, to continue to bring down the numbers of injuries and deaths at crossings.

But onto reauthorization –

You know there is a lot of talk in Washington right now about getting a rail and surface reauthorization done this session, and we are so encouraged by that. Few things could be more important or be a more valuable use of the Congress' time.

The fact that the House of Representatives took an important first step, just last week, in adopting a rail reauthorization measure, is a huge sign of momentum, and I congratulate Chairman Shuster and everyone who worked so closely with him and his staff to get that bill done.

But we need to do more. We need a comprehensive rail reauthorization package that includes funding, and safety provisions like assistance to commuter railroads to implement Positive Train Control.

As this process moves ahead, we look forward to working with both chambers of Congress as they craft a measure that builds, sustains, and enhances a safe and reliable rail network for both passenger and freight rail service. We are their ready partner, and we will do anything in our power to assist them in moving a package forward.

After all, there is a lot at stake here.

As you just heard Therese so eloquently say, our GROW AMERICA proposal, a 6-year transportation funding bill, would give States the funding certainty they need to bridge the Nation's infrastructure gap.

As you all know, rail is unique when compared to other modes of transportation in that it lacks a committed source of federal revenue.

GROW AMERICA will provide predictable, dedicated funding for rail with the establishment of a Rail Account in a new Transportation Trust Fund.

For the rail industry, GROW AMERICA means a \$29 billion investment over six years to improve rail safety and invest in a National High-Performance Rail System.

The Act also builds on current investments to vastly improve the system in areas ranging from Positive Train Control (PTC) implementation to enhancing flexibility in financing programs that will better enable the rehabilitation of aging infrastructure.

GROW AMERICA would make changes to improve existing programs. Among other topics, the Act would:

- Enhance the RRIF program, making it more accessible and flexible for borrowers.
- Revamp Amtrak's planning process to address immediate and long-term goals, such as addressing the backlog of state-of-good-repair needs and focusing on comprehensive five-year plans for each of Amtrak's business lines.
- Advance safety research by focusing on risk-reduction, new equipment testing, and workforce development.
- Assist the railroad industry in implementing Positive Train Control as the backbone of the next generation of rail safety.

GROW AMERICA would also create new programs that will focus on both current passenger rail service and the development of future passenger rail service. These programs include:

- The establishment of new Amtrak grants that would provide a longer-term view of maintaining passenger rail assets and services in good working condition.

- The Rail Service Improvement Program, which will provide competitive grants to drive development of high-performing passenger rail networks. This program also includes funding for PTC implementation for commuter railroads, local and regional planning efforts, and support for states and localities to mitigate the adverse impacts of rail operations in their communities through grade crossing improvements and rail line relocation efforts.
- Also, GROW AMERICA would help establish Regional Rail Development Authorities, which will promote greater stakeholder involvement in rail planning and development, as well as help facilitate the integration of rail projects with other modes, such as transit.
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Simply put, GROW AMERICA is our blueprint for beginning to close rail's infrastructure gap and to setting the table for the next generation of safety.

These are forward-thinking, large-scale improvements that come with some extremely important by-products—the creation of good paying jobs and the strengthening of our National economy.

And bridging our Nation's infrastructure gap gets more important with every passing day of inaction.

It's no secret that our aging infrastructure and the gaps that exist in our transportation system must be dealt with—and soon. Congress is aware of these needs and only Congress can act on them by passing GROW AMERICA.

The Administration has sent a reauthorization proposal forward and I believe Congress will ultimately take action but it is up to you to make sure that Congress gets it right. We must build on the proposal put forward by the House in order to see a comprehensive rail reauthorization bill enacted that:

- Addresses rail safety;
- Benefits our freight partners and other modes of transportation;

- Continues to support the successes of our intercity passenger rail network; and
- Provides the resources and predictable, dedicated funding to both address our infrastructure backlog and make the improvements required to meet the passenger and freight mobility needs of our growing population.

We will all benefit from a comprehensive bill. Rehabilitating our aging infrastructure simply cannot wait any longer. Thank you and I look forward to working with all of you as we strengthen our transportation network, and I look forward to taking your questions.